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## THE PILGRIM TERCENTENARY AND THEOLOGICAL PROGRESS

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The approaching tercentenary of the founding of Plymouth incites, not to say compels, a review of the remarkable developments and departures from the doctrines of the fathers that have taken place in these three hundred years and calls for a conscientious consideration of what these changes ought to lead to in theological and ecclesiastical readjustments. It is a task which overawes as well as invites and one in which there is need of wide coöperation.

## I

The chief concern of the founders of New England was not with doctrine but with church government. It was not to secure either freedom, except for their own uses, or tolerance as a principle, that they dared the perils and hardships of the deep and of the wilderness. Their aim, pursued with invincible singleness of mind, was to establish what they believed to be the only true and scriptural form of government of church and state — a coöperative theocracy. It is correct to call their commonwealth democratic only in the sense that it contained the seeds and sure previsions of democracy. That it was a great step forward in religious and social construction is universally conceded.

With the "Congregational Way," as these ecclesiastical pioneers later termed it, was closely linked a body of doctrine far more in accord with their conservative than

with their progressive principles. It was in brief that set forth by the Westminster Assembly, in whose doctrinal statements they shared fully with their brethren in England. This theology held sway over New England, though not without considerable individual dissent and with gradually loosening hold, until well into the nineteenth century and finally "collapsed" through pressure both from without and from within.

Few chapters in the history of religious thought are fuller of intensity and pathos than that of the supreme effort of Calvinism to maintain itself in this New World against the forces of religious and political progress and the increasing demand for a freer and larger faith. Calvinism found itself unable to meet the disintegrating and demoralizing influences incident to the heavy task of building up a civilization in a new and none too hospitable soil. It sufficed for elect souls initiating a new venture of faith, but it proved too barren and exacting for the wear and tear of every-day prolonged pioneering. Inevitably the severities and inconsistencies of the Westminster standards suffered modification and reduction. "Arminianism," which stood for looseness of all sorts, doctrinal, spiritual, moral, crept into New England in the eighteenth century — an admixture of rational protest against Calvinistic determinism and the other manifest extremes of doctrine and practice, and of sordid relapse into a lower stratum of faith and life. Against this incoming tide of "infidelity," threatening, so they believed, the very foundations of religion, Jonathan Edwards, Samuel Hopkins, and their comrades and successors of the "New Lights" set themselves with consuming zeal, and by sheer spiritual might turned back the tide, not only rescuing Calvinism but advancing its standard to new heights of shining victory. But they were heights impossible to maintain and "High Calvinism" soon had to ally itself with "Moderate Calvinism"

in order to resist the growing incursions of more progressive thought which had been gathering during and succeeding the Revolution and which were at length succeeded by the Unitarian movement.

## II

It has been customary to regard Unitarianism as the natural development and culmination of liberal tendencies at work within the New England churches almost from the beginning, and many attempts have been made to spread the Unitarian mantle and even to attach the Unitarian name to all the more liberal New England preachers and theologians who protested against the narrower views prevalent in their time. Perhaps the best presentation of this claim is that of George Willis Cooke in his *Unitarianism in America*. The claim is an exceedingly questionable one, though it has helped to demonstrate how many of these protesters there were, and how reasonable and vigorous were their departures from Westminster theology. If we subject these protests, as recounted by Mr. Cooke, to examination, we find that they were along the following lines: (1) Declarations in favor of liberty of individual thought and judgment, such as that made by Samuel Willard, pastor of the Old South Church of Boston and author of *A Body of Divinity* (1726), who spoke against all "dominion over the consciences of men" and lamented the "woful neglect to know the mind of Christ." (2) Recognition of the Divine revelation through nature and reason as consonant with that of Scripture, such as that so ably set forth by John Wise of Ipswich in his *Vindication of the Government of the New England Churches* (1717) and later by Ebenezer Gay of Hingham in his Duddleian lectures of 1759. (3) Insistence upon freedom of the will. Predestination and imputation naturally met with vigorous and repeated

denial. Every now and then a defender of freedom arose from the very midst of Calvinism to inveigh against its fatalism. Among such were Samuel West of New Bedford, Samuel Webster of Salisbury, Experience Mayhew, missionary to the Indians, and many others. The extent to which this departure from strict Calvinism had gone by the year 1806 is indicated in the famous compromise creed of Andover Seminary, which declared that "God's decrees perfectly consist with human liberty" — just *how* is not stated. (4) Declarations in favor of the Divine Unity as opposed to the crass, current tritheism. Among these "anti-trinitarians" were Jonathan Mayhew and Charles Chauncy of Boston, Thomas Barnard of Newburg, and William Bentley and John Prince of Salem. It has been customary to term these and their sympathizers "Arians" because they insisted upon the subordination of Christ to the Father. It would have been quite as exact to call them "Origenists" or even "Athanasians." The fact is, they had no thorough historic or theoretic knowledge of the doctrine of the Trinity. The sum of their anti-trinitarianism was a protest against the caricature of the doctrine then prevalent. (5) Affirmation of faith in the Divine Love and Fatherhood, which found no place in the Calvinism of the Westminster standards. This included a wider application of the Atonement (e.g. *The Meritorious Price of our Redemption* (1650) by William Pynchon of Springfield, a layman), and a more merciful fate for the non-elect. This liberalism went so far in several instances as to result in out-and-out Universalism, such as appears in Charles Chauncy's *Salvation of All Men* (1784) and Joseph Huntington's *Calvinism Improved* (1796).

These bold departures from the accepted doctrine were met by denunciation and attempted refutation; but the significant fact is that *the remonstrants, as a rule, remained within the pale of the general fellowship and neither re-*

*garded themselves as schismatics nor were censured by any ecclesiastical action.*<sup>1</sup> The fundamental reason for this lay in the very constitution and idea of New England Congregationalism, which held that the covenant, not the creed, is the constitutive principle of the individual church and that the pastor is answerable for his doctrinal views to his own church only. Although therefore from the first Calvinism was the accepted form of doctrine — the Cambridge Platform (1648) approving “for the substance thereof” the doctrine of the Westminster Confession<sup>2</sup> — it was the *government* of the church, “the parties of which are all of them exactly described in the Word of God,”<sup>3</sup> departure from which was the most serious offence.

Moreover there is no evidence that these “inconsistent Calvinists” made any noticeable attempt to form a sect or party to antagonize their brethren. They simply gave free utterance to truth that came to them and submitted it to the Christian consciousness and reason of their hearers, their readers, and their associates. The fact, germane and honorable to the Congregational fellowship, is that there was a place for these independent minds, warm though it may have been — or perhaps, one should say *cold* — within the common body. They not only did not form a party; they did not even form a wing. They were the fearless spokesmen of new truth “breaking forth from God’s word.”

To class these early representatives of a freer and more progressive faith then as Unitarians is unwarranted. They were not Unitarians, for the simple reason that Unitarianism had not then come into existence.

Unitarianism arose as a coöperative, purposeful movement, with a definite existence and character of its own.

<sup>1</sup> The treatment of William Pynchon was a marked exception.

<sup>2</sup> See Williston Walker; Congregationalists (American Church History Series), p. 160.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. p. 162.

It originated when ministers and churches sought each other with the sense of a common consciousness and a common mission. It began when these associates commenced to say "we" and not "I."

By common consent the "magna charta" of American Unitarianism is Channing's Baltimore sermon of 1819. Throughout this sermon—though the term "Unitarian" does not appear—one of the most significant features is the constant recurrence of the term "we." "We" hold thus and thus. It is the symbol of the birth of a Unitarian consciousness. It marks the emergence of a new self-centred segregate. In a later utterance of Channing, *Objections to Unitarian Christianity Considered*, this consciousness, coupled with the frequent use of the term "Unitarians," was still more pronounced and aggressive. Thenceforth it developed rapidly and at length led to organization and propaganda. It would be assuming too much to say that this segregation was not provoked, perhaps compelled. All that I desire to point out is that this corporate consciousness and doctrinal consensus were essential to the very existence of Unitarianism as such and that prior to it there was no real "Unitarianism." It is of no slight importance that it be kept in mind that original and pure American Congregationalism was not, as has been said, a system of doctrine but a way of government,<sup>4</sup> and that it had room within it, as it developed, both for an expansion of its idea of the "Way" and also for independent, outspoken theological thought. It was the false and misguided, not the true, representatives of the New England churches who finally closed the door to doctrinal freedom and development. Had there been more of Christian liberality and grace and wisdom on both sides, there would have been room also for the movement which became Unitarianism within the general

<sup>4</sup> This was quite correctly though not quite amicably argued by the Unitarians. The claim provoked resentment, even denial, because converted into capital for controversy.

body. That, however, is past. Of more concern is it to trace the theological development of the two separating branches and to endeavor to see how they stand related to each other theologically at the present time.

### III

The history of the bi-linear theology after the great separation is full of interest and significance. Like two divergent streams from the same source the two dissentient theologies flowed on, now drawing apart, now approaching one another, never without mutual interaction and influence.

The Trinitarian branch moved farther and farther from its original source in the Westminster theology out into the warmth and freedom of a more expansive faith. It had long chafed within the narrow banks of Calvinism and had worn the channel wider and wider under the guise of "improvements." "The entire history of theology in New England," as Dr. Munger once remarked, "may be called an improvement."<sup>5</sup> But improvements soon gave way to something more radical. It was not long after the rise of Unitarianism that the New England theology began, through the operation of its own inner life process, to break up. President Dwight published his *Theology* of softened Calvinism in 1818. Ten years later Nathaniel W. Taylor delivered his famous *Concio ad Clerum* in New Haven, in which he made the then revolutionary assertion that "sin is man's own act, consisting in a free choice of some object rather than God as his chief good." This was followed by the long and ardent controversy over Taylorism that shook the New England theology to its depths. Later came Charles G. Finney with his evangel of free choice of salvation based upon virtual repudiation of Calvinistic election. A more

<sup>5</sup> Benjamin W. Bacon: Theodore Thornton Munger, p. 345.

deeply spiritual and pervasive solvent of the old doctrines was introduced by James Marsh of Vermont University in his epochal publication of Coleridge's *Aids to Reflection* (1840), opening as it did a new fountain of thought and life in the desert of conventional materialistic theology.

Yet the New England theology lingered on, not only in the backward pulpits of conservatism, but in such a centre of light and leading as Andover, where it produced its last brilliant exponent in Edwards A. Park. The new day of larger and freer things did not fully dawn until Horace Bushnell's fresh and emancipating thought had won its way to wide recognition. Then the new wine began to be poured into new wine-skins. The New England theology passed into abandonment and decadence. The transition was not made wholly without conflict and bitterness. Both the honored American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions and Andover Seminary were almost rent in twain by the effort to substitute a humane doctrine of the determination of human destiny and the wider mission of Christ for the old dogma of the eternal damnation of the heathen. But in each case the schism was healed and further separation avoided.

The "New Theology," as it has grown up within the Congregational fellowship under such thinkers as Horace Bushnell, Henry Ward Beecher, Theodore T. Munger, Egbert C. Smyth, Lyman Abbott, Newman Smyth, George A. Gordon, and others, while it has developed in close contact with the wider movement in the same direction, exhibits a peculiarly clear and comprehensive form of the "new" doctrines. These doctrines were inherent in original Christianity but obscured and inhibited under the reign of Calvinism. Restored and developed into a large and initial whole, they may be summarized thus: (1) Divine immanence, prominent in Greek theology

but obscured in Latin theology, ignored in Augustinianism and hence in Calvinism, which was the most pronounced Protestant form of Augustinianism; (2) the witness of the Christian consciousness or experience, as contrasted with the external authority of the written word; (3) continuous creation, as contrasted with static creation, regarding man as evolved physically from nature, though spiritually born from above; (4) salvation, social as well as individual; (5) Christ the centre of the Christian revelation, his incarnation interpreting and fulfilling all other incarnations and his suffering and death revealing the divine law of atonement.

So sharp is the contrast between these distinctive doctrines of yesterday and today and those of the theology that prevailed from the time of the founding of Massachusetts to the downfall of the New England theology, that it seems difficult to trace any continuity whatever between them. Yet there is a continuity. It consists (1) in a deep underlying substratum of common conviction, and (2) in an intellectual and spiritual devotion to religious truth as intense and unflagging as any the human mind has witnessed. Such continuous loyalty to truth forms a bond as strong as ever linked a spiritual succession. The fruit of it is no poor conformity, or uniformity, of intellectual belief, nor any passive development of one type of doctrine from another, but a heroic recognition of the imperative obligation of serious thought upon the problems of religion which survives in some degree even today among the sons of the Pilgrims and Puritans.

It is true that, as President Tucker has pointed out, speculation has given place to inquiry.<sup>6</sup> Successors of the New England theologians hold back from the speculative daring of the fathers who, as Dr. Munger has said,

<sup>6</sup> "No one, I am sure, can overlook the immense moral gain which has taken place through the transfer of thought in so large degree from speculation to sober inquiry." William J. Tucker; *Idealism in Education; Public-mindedness*, p. 314.

“waived nothing”;<sup>7</sup> but neither their courage nor their love of truth has been wholly lost.

#### IV

When we turn to the history of Unitarian theology, we find here also not stagnation nor retrogression but agitation, controversy, advance. Unitarian thought did not, could not, stop where Channing left it. It had its own course to run, its own problems to meet, its own findings to work out. Protest was its original mission, but it could not live upon protest.

One of the first of these issues was to determine its own conception of Christianity as a religion and of Christ as its founder. This was no light task. It called for constructive thought; and the early Unitarians were not strong in constructive thinking. Protest was far simpler and at first sorely needed. Channing was a genuine master of protest. Ethically sound and virile, intellectually clear and discerning, he exposed the fallacies and inconsistencies of orthodoxy with prophetic power and indignation, though not always with full justice. His protest against a degraded and degrading conception of humanity was not only sound but, as Dr. George A. Gordon has said, it was “a revival of the New Testament interpretation of human nature.”<sup>8</sup> His attack on the doctrine of the Trinity — directed against a “Trinitarianism” prevalent in his day but which had no more resemblance to original and genuine Trinitarianism than had the New England Primer to the Nicene Creed — was largely justified. As prophet and reformer Channing was unrivalled, in Christian character and devotion resplendent, but as theologian he was neither learned nor profound. Nor did early Unitarianism possess any outstanding constructive theologian.

<sup>7</sup> Horace Bushnell, p. 38.

<sup>8</sup> *Ultimate Conceptions of Faith*, p. 34.

The notable fact about early American Unitarianism is the radicalism of its protests and the conservatism of its products. As a protest against a narrow doctrine of man and a "deformed" tritheism it was, as Dr. Gordon contends, "wholesome, magnificent, providential."<sup>9</sup> But as a positive constructive force it was slow in getting on its feet. It did not know what to do with miracles, and so accepted them. It did not know how to forge a new and better conception of Christianity, and so fell back on the old one. When it came to formulating a doctrinal account of itself, the American Unitarian Association in 1853 unanimously adopted a resolution declaring that "the Divine authority of the Gospel, as founded on a special and miraculous interposition of God, is the basis of the action of the Association."<sup>10</sup> The instinctive loyalty of this declaration to the unique nature and mission of Christianity is commendable, but its perception of the true character of this mission is dull and commonplace enough. "A special and miraculous interposition" sounds like an echo from the wastes of Protestant scholasticism.

Across the barren desert of this theological impotence and lethargy rang the voice of a fresh and unfettered thinker, Theodore Parker. Here at length was an original and contributive mind; a giant, with a giant's strength — and weakness — rugged, human, forceful; too little balanced and reflective to be a great theologian, but bringing genuine opulence as well as candor to the Unitarian cause. At first the lately stoned prophets were for stoning this new prophet sprung from their own ranks, but—they thought better of it, and in due time built him a monument as to one of their chosen vessels. Parker's great sermon on *The Transient and Permanent in Christianity* (1841) — now regarded as the second of

<sup>9</sup> The Christ of Today, p. 37.

<sup>10</sup> Cooke: Unitarianism in America, p. 157.

the three chief documents of Unitarianism, though at the time greeted with condemnation and contumely — had a salutary influence upon Unitarianism. Though marred here and there, as Chadwick says, with a “purple patch of rhetoric,” it is a noble setting forth of the essential elements of Christianity, rich in true thought and feeling. Its distinction between doctrine and the greater reality behind it had in it the promise of a new day. Yet its conception of Christ and of the relation of his person to his words is hazy and ill-defined and lacks the sense of his redeeming power. This latter deficiency is not singular, since sin and evil find little place in Parker’s *Weltanschauung*.

Parker, with all his defects, was a great force, intellectual and religious, and with the larger-minded men of the fellowship, like Hedge, Clarke, and Bellows, saved Unitarian Christianity from lapsing into blank supernaturalism, on the one hand, and mere morality on the other. Above all, did he and they save Unitarianism from the dismal barrenness of a “mere man” conception of Him in whom “the godlike and the human met and embraced and a divine life was born.”<sup>11</sup> The incipient tendency to reduce Jesus to the dimensions and influence of “the man you may meet any day in the street” seems to have now completely vanished from Unitarianism.

A second issue which Unitarianism had to face was raised by its attitude toward other religions. Predisposed toward catholicity and sympathy with other faiths and stimulated by the studies of its own scholars in this field, Unitarianism more than once seemed in danger of substituting eclecticism for Christianity, of losing its own identity in its effort to touch hands with every alien religious aspiration, however distant or vagrant.

This inner and subtle peril was felt by the organizers of the National Unitarian Conference in 1865. For, after

<sup>11</sup> The Transient and Permanent in Christianity.

much discussion, a clause was inserted in the conference platform stating that its members are "Disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ." To offset this apparent illiberality and promote wider affiliations, the Free Religious Association was organized in Boston in 1867. The friction caused by these divergent points of view continued for many years. It entered into the controversy with the Western Unitarian Association, which was bent upon adopting into Unitarianism every form of righteousness and every impulse toward a higher life. Slowly, however, the Unitarian body as a whole came to the consciousness that to be coherent it must be Christian and that to be Christian it must keep in touch with Jesus Christ. This conviction found expression at the national conference at Saratoga in 1894 in the declaration commencing, "These churches accept the religion of Jesus," etc., and later in the adoption of the clause "the leadership of Jesus" in the denominational Confession.

A third issue which the Unitarians had to meet, and one of peculiar difficulty, was the choice between theism and pantheism, or perhaps one should say between theism and monism. This issue was unconsciously thrust upon them by their greatest prophet and personality — *with* them yet not quite *of* them — Ralph Waldo Emerson. This is not to say that Emerson was himself a pantheist. He vibrated between pantheism and theism and only in his maturer thought came to equilibrium in theism. Much of his teaching, however, is so far pantheistic as to be both unchristian and unmoral. The famous Divinity School Address of 1838 — sometimes accounted the third great utterance of Unitarianism — full though it is of sweetness and light, is but a sorry version of the real substance of the Christian message. Underneath all the foolish disparagement with which it was assailed by Unitarians as well as by orthodox, lay the instinctive consciousness that this was neither true Christianity nor true Unitarianism.

No great seer and sage ever called for closer discrimination in the reception of his message than Emerson. While Unitarianism has been not a little misled by his vaguer and more naturalistic sentiments, it is upon the whole an evidence of its spiritual stability that it has not been more completely confused by its great prophet and deflected from vital ethics and theism. In the main it has stored his wheat and burned his chaff — or at least left it in the field for weaker minds to mistake for grain.

But what of Transcendentalism? Was not that a by-path into which Unitarianism strayed and from which it returned to the main road confused and exhausted? On the contrary, the Unitarian attachment to Transcendentalism — which was a movement far wider than its ranks — was on the whole an evidence of intellectual and spiritual sensitiveness. For Transcendentalism, when reduced to its essence, meant reliance upon moral and spiritual intuition as over against the crass materialism and rationalism of orthodoxy. It was a nineteenth-century rendering of the second chapter of First Corinthians. If it was not the “whole gospel,” it was a needed philosophical *prolegomenon* of it. It stood for the truth that spiritual things must be spiritually discerned — though by no means as well able to coördinate this truth with the practical application of the gospel as was Paul. Here again, to be sure, there were transcendental lapses and lispings on the part of weaker brethren, and sometimes on the part of stronger; but in the large, Transcendentalism laid hold of a genuine principle and helped to establish the self-evidencing nature of moral and spiritual truth.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>12</sup> While Unitarianism, through the fear of dogmatic systemism, has been hesitant about launching theological systems, and thus has contributed less to the science of theology than it might otherwise have done, it has never lost interest in the intellectual apprehension of religion. The one outstanding text-book in theology produced by American Unitarianism, Professor C. C. Everett's posthumous *Theism and the Christian Faith*, is characterized by learning, philosophic judgment, and breadth, and, although of the Neo-Hegelian school modified by Schleiermacher, deliberately presents the theistic doctrine of God as well as the absoluteness of Christianity.

On the whole, the history of American Unitarian theology shows that it has escaped serious pitfalls, has assimilated the best and strongest and rejected the worst and weakest in the movements which have arisen within or about it, and has — like its kindred denomination — advanced steadily in its apprehension and interpretation of “pure Christianity.”

## V

In the light of this conclusion we may go on to attempt to estimate the present theological situation as relates to the two branches of original New England Congregationalism on the eve of its tercentenary. What have the two fellowships in common? What have they of a distinctive and separative character? And how can they draw closer together for a common task in these urgent days that call for the greatest possible Christian unity?

In the first place, it must be evident that each fellowship has much to repent of in its treatment of the other, the Trinitarians of bitterness and scorn in their attitude toward Unitarians, the Unitarians of intemperance and injustice in their denunciations of Trinitarians. There have been acts too as well as words that were neither charitable nor Christian, such as the exclusion of Unitarians from Congregational pulpits on the one side, and on the other the appropriation of church property on the basis of a claim which was legal rather than equitable. The injustice of this latter action has been recently magnanimously admitted by a well-known Unitarian who adds his tribute to “the splendid loyalty to conscience which inspired the conservatives to depart from an organization which they deemed hostile to the Christian faith.”<sup>13</sup> Is it not time that we of

<sup>13</sup> Dean W. W. Fenn; *The Religious History of New England*. Harvard University Press (1917), p. 111.

the Trinitarian lineage acknowledged that the charge of "robbery" preferred against the Unitarians was also unjust? The old bitterness and jealousy have now happily at length passed away, though not a little of prejudice and suspicion lingers — far less in New England, significantly, especially about Boston, than in parts of the country where less of the whole matter is known.

Endeavors toward mutual understanding and good will, both courageous and Christian, have frequently been made — notable among them those of Horace Bushnell, Cyrus Bartol, T. T. Munger, James Freeman Clarke, George A. Gordon, and Starr King. The latter's "memorable" sermon — *Spiritual Christianity* — is one of the strongest, most scholarly, and most eloquent of irenic sermons, and is as timely today as when it was delivered.

Probably the volume that has done most to interpret the opposing parties to each other is James Freeman Clarke's *Truths and Errors of Orthodoxy*, which appeared in 1866. Clarke, in the judgment of the writer, was the ablest theologian as well as one of the finest characters American Unitarianism has produced, and this book is one of the most penetrative and discriminating contributions to American theology. Its extensive circulation has given it a wide and beneficial influence, and the name of its author deserves honor and gratitude from these kindred bodies and from all lovers of truth and fairness.

The doctrinal issues between the two fellowships are now to a large degree obsolete, for the simple reason that the whole theological situation has changed. We are in another theological era. Old things are passed away, all is new — viewpoint, task, outlook. That does not mean the denial of continuity but the confirmation of it. It would be impossible, for instance, to revive the controversy over the doctrine of the Trinity as it once raged.

The assertion has often been made and is quite warranted, that neither side in the contest fully understood the doctrine, either historically or philosophically. This is well illustrated by a statement of Dr. Andrew P. Peabody, who was far better acquainted with the history of doctrine than most of his contemporaries, that "the Nicene creed is expressly *anti-trinitarian*, making Christ a derived and thus of necessity a subordinate being"<sup>14</sup>—as if derivation, or at least differentiation in unity, were not essential to the very essence of the doctrine of the Trinity, except as the New England tritheism had perverted it. How significant was it of the change of attitude, or of atmosphere, when Dr. Hedge declared, "We cannot be too thankful that the Athanasian view prevailed against the Arian which recognizes no divinity in man"<sup>15</sup>!

With respect to the nature and destiny of man, Congregationalism has come far closer in its later development to Channing's reverent and noble appraisal of human worth at its best, though it has carried into it also a perception of the darker side of human nature such as neither Channing nor his successors grasped but which history, especially of late, has amply confirmed.

In its doctrine of Christ, Unitarianism has been as vacillating and vague as Congregationalism has been dogmatic and conventional. Both are coming to see in him far more than either originally saw.

## VI

The two fellowships are undoubtedly drawing nearer together as they move forward, in common with the whole body of Christians, into a larger conception of Christianity and its cardinal truths. Yet the statement

<sup>14</sup> Unitarianism: Its Origin and History, p. 156. (*Italics mine.*)

<sup>15</sup> Reason in Religion, p. 238; quoted by Charles A. Allen, in Unitarianism of Today, p. 11.

of Dean Fenn that the "two bodies have arrived, each in its own way, at substantially similar theological conclusions on the points once at issue," is open to question.<sup>16</sup> In spite of very large agreements, there are still substantial differences which it is no gain to overlook. Perhaps the most deeply rooted divergence concerns human nature, or in other words the doctrine of sin. Here, it seems to most Congregationalists, the Unitarians have always been and still are inclined to a superficial optimism which is untrue to reality. The article, for instance, in the Unitarian Confession affirming belief in "the Progress of Mankind onward and upward forever," while provoking no positive dissent, seems to the sterner Puritan lineage essentially misleading because of what it fails to recognize — namely, the great struggle and cost of progress and the need of divine succor which it involves. Progress is a great, a divine truth, but it is not so near to the heart of Christianity as redemption, and divorced from redemption progress is but a roseate naturalistic self-deception.

Retaining a deep sense of the need of redemption, most Congregationalists cannot satisfy themselves with merely affirming "the leadership of Jesus." That leadership they gladly acknowledge and they see that it involves, if carried through, the transformation of the whole structure of society from bottom to top — social, educational, international. But they seek and find in Jesus Christ also a necessary dynamic, an impelling power, enabling men to do the things which they know they ought to do under his leadership but which they fail to do for lack of strength and impulse until they find in him "the power of God unto salvation." Perhaps it may be chargeable to a survival of something of the old inclination to rest back upon a Higher Power which characterizes Calvinism, but at all events the more

<sup>16</sup> Religious History of New England, p. 132.

conservative branch of the lineage of the Pilgrims retains more of a sense of dependence upon God and is inclined to put quite as much stress upon the second part of that ringing exclamation of Paul, "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me," as upon the first. Moreover they find in the long-abused doctrine of atonement a recognition of the place which sacrificial, vicarious — though not substitutionary — suffering has in human redemption which their Unitarian brethren do not seem as yet fully to recognize.

In the conception of God too there is a difference of shading, if not of substance. If, as Dean Fenn states, the Unitarians have gone over to a "Calvinism of immanence,"<sup>17</sup> the Trinitarians, while sharing to the full the doctrine of immanence, have endeavored to retain also the doctrine of transcendence, believing both to be essential to Divine Fatherhood.

## VII

With these theological divergences — in spite of so much in common — still remaining, can the two fellowships come closer together? How can two walk together unless they are agreed? Clearly they cannot unless they have enough of agreement to undergird their differences. On the other hand, if they were absolutely agreed in every particular and point of view, of what stimulus were walking together? What is the case with these two disparted companies of disciples? Have they enough in common and enough that is original and distinctive to make a closer comradeship contributive to the common good? Certainly they have, along with their divergences, a great deal in common doctrinally. Yet there is a far more fundamental unity than that of doctrinal consent, essential to genuine sympathy and fellowship,

<sup>17</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 129.

and that is experiential unity. Have these two bodies a common and uniting Christian experience?

There is a very prevalent impression among "Evangelical" bodies that Unitarians are lacking in spiritual life, that though they may abound in prayer and good works, they have not so much as heard that there is a Holy Ghost, that their religion is almost wholly moral and intellectual and very little experimental and communicative. Perhaps there has been some ground for this assumption. Unitarianism has clearly been characterized by a certain aloofness, a self-consciousness, at times painful to others, if not to itself. Unitarianism is, of all Christian bodies, the most analytical and introspective. It is almost pathetic to note how many attempts Unitarians have made to define themselves. The effort began with Channing and has been continued by President Eliot, Professor Emerton, Charles W. Wendte, Charles G. Ames, M. J. Savage, E. A. Horton, S. M. Crothers, S. A. Eliot, Howard N. Brown, William L. Sullivan, and, one might almost add, all other Unitarians. Such excessive self-examination is not edifying. It reminds one of the extreme morbidness, in individual experience, of a John Bunyan or a David Brainerd; only unfortunately there is very little of denominational penitence and self-reproach in it. It is in its way almost as bad as "such boastings" as the Congregationalists use, "or lesser breeds without the law," and makes one wonder if we are not all, after all, "miserable sinners."

Yet it is not this which has been complained of in the Unitarians so much as their frigidity. Did not Emerson himself call Unitarianism an "ice chest"? And yet in the utterances of representative American Unitarians — as Charles A. Allen has so conclusively shown in his *Unitarianism of Today* — preference has often been given to the religion of the heart over that of the head. "It

was of the very essence of the liberal movement," declares John W. Chadwick, "to emphasize the ethical and spiritual." "It is of less moment," asserted Hedge, "that the intellect should form a perfect conception than that the heart should have perfect conviction." "Religion is not a theory for the understanding, but a life to the soul," wrote J. H. Allen.<sup>18</sup> And one of the latest and best interpreters of Unitarianism, Professor Christie, holds that "the first and fundamental characteristic of Unitarianism is that it is an undogmatic church" and that religious union begins "whenever two souls recognize in one another a direct, real, and inward contact with the divine life."<sup>19</sup> It may be objected that these are individual utterances and do not reflect the temper of the body as a whole. However that may be, the tendency of Unitarianism today is certainly in the direction of greater warmth and outgo of spiritual life. The recent interest in mysticism and the preaching mission attest this. Who would have dreamed ten years ago of a Unitarian revival? Nor are these mere sporadic efforts to make the wheels go round, but evidences of a genuine spiritual renaissance throughout the Unitarian body.

It is neither right nor Christian to let outgrown issues determine present attitudes. Theology must be justified of her children. If there is to be continued, upon the part of the "Evangelical" churches, a policy of withholding fellowship from Unitarianism upon theological ground, it must be made clear that it is based upon actual theological disharmonies sufficient to warrant so unbrotherly an attitude.

Yet this paper is not intended for the purpose of raising an issue but of surveying a great theological movement dating from the very beginnings of New England. I

<sup>18</sup> Unitarianism of Today, pp. 30-31.

<sup>19</sup> Francis A. Christie; Unitarianism. American Journal of Theology, October, 1917, p. 555.

have dealt with it in only one of its denominational aspects. A larger treatment would require consideration of other denominational theological relationships.

As one looks back upon the movement of American theology since 1620 it can hardly be without a sense of gratitude for the progress that has been made, not only in truth but in charity. There is reason for thankfulness, not only that the old controversies have died out, but that the very spirit of controversy, which was the animus of separation, has fallen into desuetude. Looking back from this distance it seems strange that controversial theology ever had such vogue, that the idea and practice of polemics could ever have assumed so large a place in minds so sweet and strong. The whole method of attack and defence is alien to the spirit of Christianity, a corollary perhaps of the obsolete philosophy of war as a method of settling differences.

Great indeed is the cause for gratitude that we of this generation have come — through little virtue or achievement of our own — out of the atmosphere of controversy into one of friendliness, in which we can not only work together but reason together concerning the great things of the kingdom. Along this open road, leading on to larger truth and deeper unity, we of the Pilgrim lineage may walk in generous fellowship with one another and with all our fellow Christians, assured that in so doing we shall lose nothing of the high purpose and true spirit of the fathers.